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'GONE TO THE WAR'

and other POEMS in the Lincolnshire Dialect

by BERNARD GILBERT.

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GONE TO THE WAR

WORKS BY BERNARD GILBERT

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Belgium, 1914

In spring I sowed the corn,
All green and lush it grew,
I hoed it row by row
The pleasant summer through.

The rain by night refreshed,
The sun by day gave strength,
With care I watched it change,
The harvest came at length.

At sunrise, when, this morn,
I left my wife and child
To reap the golden corn,
With happiness I smiled.

By midday came the storm,
Iron and blood by turn,
Ruin to beat me down,
Havoc to slay and burn.

Death fell upon my farm,
His sickle in his hand,
The dykes are flush with blood,
And corpses hide the land.

The corn lies in the rut,
Ploughed down by Death's own share,
My child went underfoot,
My wife . . . I know not where.

My cottage shows one fang,
One beam, amid the wreck,
That marks where I shall hang
At sunset . . . by the neck.

GONE TO THE WAR

AND OTHER POEMS IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE DIALECT

BY

BERNARD GILBERT

LINCOLN:
J. W. RUDDOCK & SONS, 287 HIGH STREET
1915

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J. REDFEARN WILLIAMSON

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Gone to the War

He's gone to the war, he's gone to the war,
I doan't care a rap if I see him noa more;
He lethered me reg'lar, Saturday night,
When he collared his wages and allers got tight;
I'm sure I prefer to be single by far
Now he's gone to the war, now he's gone to the war.

His waages was thirteen and sixpence a week,
Wi' extry in harvest, but that was to seek
A cottage—nowt else—made up all our paay,
And when you've ten childer that's not much a daay;
He gev me nine shillings, it didn't goa far:
But now I have plenty—he's gone to the war.

A little bit more'n a shilling a daay
To feed 'em and cloathe 'em and bills for to paay;
The grocer he hated me going to shop,
And as for the butcher—we lived upon sop!
Water and bread, water and bread,
On plenty of water our childer was fed.

We was allers in debt 'coz we couldn't keep out,
Except at the pub, where noa credit's about;
If I wanted to find him I knawed where to goa:
He would be at the "Bull" wi' his mates in a row.
I slaaved at my work while he sung in the bar,
But I'm getting it back now he's gone to the war.

The sarjint popped in and he saw half a dozen—
Our Tom, Arthur Bates, Willie Jones and his cousin:
" There's plenty of vittles, and little to do,
" Wi' a suit of good cloathes and a medal or two ":
They all joined together to have a last drink,
And that sarjint he snapped 'em afore they could wink.

He telled me about it: I said nowt the while,
I had to look solemn and try not to smile,
Because I should get—in the paper I seed—
Nearly two quid a week, and noa husband to feed!
" You can send me a quid and still save on the rest ";
I nodded my head and said that would be best.

" Each week you can send it, I'll leave my address,
" And when the war's done I'll come back to you, Bess."
Soa off he went smiling to Lincoln, full sail,
Wi' cheering and shouting and plenty of ale;
I cried till he'd gone, then set off for to seek
The man what was handing out two quid a week.

Two quid a week! two quid a week!
Who wouldn't sell husbands for two quid a week?
Noa drink and noa bother, noa quarrelsome brutes
What's nasty and dirty and sleeps in their boots;
I pretended to cry, but I laughed in my cheek—
I'd swap forty husbands for two quid a week!

He come hoam on Sat'dy the colour of chalk,
They'd very nigh killed him to judge by his talk;
He'd marched and he'd sweated wi' noa chanch to shirk,
Not sin' he was born had he done soa much work;
He cried like a babby to get in the door,
And when it was Monday, he cried all the more.

He's gone to the war, he's gone to the war,
I shan't care a rap if I see him noa more;
Ten childer is plenty to take your attention,
Though sewing-machines is a useful invention;
I can buy owt I want wi' noa husband to keep,
I'm as happy as happy on two quid a week.

There's nobbut one trouble as troubles me now,
And that's how much longer them Germans can go;
They've stood it a year and my childer looks grand,
We've clothes and we've boots and we've money in hand.
If the war should stop now it would be moast distressing,
For one thing is certain: it's just been a blessing.

If anything happens I draw on a pension,
Not two quid a week, but it's still worth attention.
Of course, if the war would keep on a few years,
I shouldn't be bothering, then, wi' noa fears;
There would be enough saved to flit out of this Fen
And when Tom come home he could marry agen.

There niver was knawn such good times for to be,
Wi' two quid a week I'm in clover, you see.
Every now and agen Tom writes hoam for his quid—
Says he'll niver come back if I doan't do his bid!
But I shan't care a rap if I see him noa more,
He can stop where he is now he's gone to the war.

* * * *

But p'r'aps he'll improve now he's gone from his hoam,
And turn like he was when a-courtin' he come;
If that sarjint can straighten him into a lover,
I should long for the daay when the war would be over;
A sweetheart, a husband, a father, and more—
God knows I should welcome him hoam from the war.

The Farm Foreman

I

Wotcher doin' theer, Thomas? weshin' the trap?
That be danged fer a tale! pop 'er out i' the raain;
'Ere's a shower comin': we'ant that wesh yer trap?
A course it will: what's that? mester's down the laane,
An' said you must 'ev it ready by 'e come back?
'Arken to me, my lad!
I'm your mester: is that plaain?
Them as dudn't 'eed me, 'ez to pack
An' goa elsewhere and start all over agaain,
Soa let's 'ev noa more chelp. Pike off, young chap,
Into yon field of mangolds by the "Bain".

II

Mornin' mester: Yis: we're goin' to 'ev a shower,
I telled young Thomas to pop your trap outside
Soa as the raain could wesh it fer an 'our.
What saay? Can 'e bide
To wesh the trap 'issen?
A course 'e can!
The mangolds in yon field can eeasy waait;
What's it matter if the weeds does choak 'em?
You can eeasy goa round wi' yer spud and poak 'em;
Can I find another man?
Noa doubt I can!
I shall mebbe find one swingin' on a gaate,
Or purtendin' to be a scar'-crow in a gap;
We shan't stop short fer a man;
I could mek one wi' a 'taaty bag and some bran!
But we needn't bother about yon weeds;
Let 'em wait!
What saay? It dudn't matter about the trap?
Off wi' you, Thomas, to the mangolds, straight.

III

Yonder 'e goas, the mester, down the laane,
Slappin' 'is leggin's wi' 'is fancy caane,
'Is 'ead bent forrard, thinkin', noa doubt, as 'ow
It all depends on *'im* who follers the plough,
Why . . . Bless yer 'eart!
'E knaws noa more about it than a baabe unborn,
Nayther who's among the tonnups nor among the corn;
'E niver dreeams
Who 'ez the teeams;
'E 'ardly knaws one 'oss frum another;
If I telled 'im as "Blossom" wor "Tinker's" brother
(What stands beside 'im in 'is stall),
'E'd nod 'is 'ead:
That's all.

IV

'E rides to th' 'ounds wi' 'is boots all shinin',
In cooat an' breeches wi' some fancy linin',
Got up like squire, an' all t'other kings,
Not botherin' 'is 'ead about sich ornery things
As peeas or 'taates,
Or mendin' owd gaates;
'E gallops awaay on "Prince William," soa fine,
You'd niver believe as 'e'd wokked in 'is time;
To-night 'e'll be playin' at cards wi' the squire
While I shall be lottin' the wok, by the fire;
An' when, about five, we are feedin' the 'osses,
'E'll slive inter bed to forgit all 'is losses.
When they asks 'im 'owever 'e 'raanges to do it
'E tells 'em it nobbut wants braains puttin' to it;
If it wodn't for me
Gittin' up about three,
All 'is braains wouldn't manage next 'arvest to see.

V

I do believe 'e thinks 'e knaws the waay,
Be nobbut ridin' ovver, once a daay,
To manage all the men, the crops, the land,
The forty thousand other things on hand
What needs a foreman's niver-sleepin' eyes.
I goas round to 'is winder, in the mornin',
Just when the sun be dawnin';
'E pops 'is 'ead out, lookin' wondrous wise:
" What'll the weather be like, Joe—Fair to middlin'?
" You'll start the reg'lar gang a 'taaty riddlin',
" Ow's my owd mare?
" The craws in yon far wheeat field needs attention,
" 'Ere's lots of other jobs I want to mention;
" If you can keep 'em busy fer a bit,
" I'll tell you laater, all the rest of it;
" Just now . . . I think I'll git back inter bed."
In goas 'is 'ead.
I set the men a plenty wok las' night;
My breakfas' mun be omost ready now,
I feel as thirsty as a one-eyed cow,
A glass or two of beer'll set me right.

VI

An' yit, ye know, the mester 'as some sense,
'E doan't rush like a bullock at a fence,
When straangers wants to buy or sell a hoss,
'E keeps one eye fixed fast on me all rate
Saavin' 'issen a mortal deeal o' loss.
A quiet nod or wink frum me goas straight,
I allers 'andles 'im the rate waay round
An' wouldn't pass a rick-backed 'oss fer sound,
No! Not for twenty tips of twenty pound.
Not all the money 'oarded round about
Would iver maak me sell our mester out;
What's more, 'e some'ow 'ez the sense to see,

It's better as I doan't 'ev to agree.
When I be in the rate, an 'e be wrong
'E maaks noa song,
Becoz 'e knaws I nivver meean 'im 'arm,
An' that's the secret 'ow to run a farm.

VII

Then 'ere's the Missis, bless 'er pretty face!
Think's she's that practical about the plaace,
Wi' chicken runs an' breeds of fancy 'ens,
An' cottage dreans an' "Doctorin' the caase"
(As if we couldn't manage for oursens!)
But she's that pleasant-faaced and oppen-'earted,
You can't say "No", when once she's fairly started.
You niver mind
'Er oppenin' our little bedroom winders
Soa as our tender chests (she says) 'll 'arden!
Nor bonnin' our ole cloes an' things to cinders.
Nor tekkin' men awaay in 'arvest time
To milk 'er cows or dig the kitchen garden,
Or feed 'er 'ens on lime!
An' if she talks soa fast that we can't foller,
It's better'n some brazen trollop's 'oller
Like squire's wife, I niver could abide,
What allers wants to poak 'er noaz inside:
No! Our young missis does 'er level best,
Mebbe it ain't much good; but we doan't tell,
It 'elps to keep 'er quiet. For the rest,
If she knaws nowt . . . perhaps . . . it's just as well.

VIII

The secret of good foremen—like mysen—
Laays all in knawin' 'ow to treat yer men,
Moast on 'em's mortal bad; a few is good;
An' all on 'em 'ez 'eads like lumps o' wood,
You niver knaw what mischief'll be brewin'.
And wok's the last thing as you catch 'em doin'.

But our men ain't much chance to shirk,
'Coz I knaw what's a fair daay's work,
Good reeason why: I started low,
The jobs is few as I doan't know;
I know 'ow much a man can plough,
'Ow long it teks to milk a cow,
Who's gone an' done a fair daay's share,
Who's 'o'din' back and dudn't care,
Who wants a word of praaise to 'elp,
An' who wants sackin' fer 'is chelp.
Some men 'ud wok until they bost,
Others 'ud see you further fost;
Some on 'em tries to do what's right,
Others wants watchin' daay an' night;
When you knaw 'ow to manage men,
You're fit fer farmin' by yersen.

IX

But all as I've bin talkin' on is nowt,
'Ere's nobbut one thing matters—that's the land!
All other things is wo'thless—less than owt;
The land! I loves it! As I laays in bed
I can see ivery foot on it in me 'ead.
I knaw where ivery sheep an' bullock laays,
An' watches 'em in fancy where they graaze;
I knaw what watter stan's in ivery dyke,
Blindfold I'd take you anywhere you like;
Nowt graws nor moves but what I knaw about it,
What's done is by my leeave, nowt's done wi'out it;
I send the 'oss to plough, the man to hoe,
Nuthink can graw,
But I've the movin' an' the tendin' on it:
It's my farm, idn't it? A-course it be;
I reckon as it fair belongs to me.

X

I loves to stan' an' watch 'em plough fer wheeat,
The furrers turnin' reg'lar, fit to eeat,
All brown an' meller, straight as any arrer,
It stirs you to the middle of yer marrer ;
The craws behint the plough, all 'ungry, 'oppin',
The 'orses keepin' step an' niver stoppin',
The steeam uprisin' frum their backs to meet
The ploughman's frosty breath . . .
It 'ud be death
To tek me frum it now ; I love it soa ;
I only asks to stop an' watch things graw.

XI

When I be deead an' gone to 'eaven
I ain't noa fear :
Why ?
'Coz they must 'ev foreman there to lend a 'and
The saame as down belaw. 'Ere mayn't be beer,
Nor yit noa 'bacca (parson says not),
But 'ere must be land :
Else where would they stand ?
An' if 'ere's farmin', somebody must be got
To see as things is done accordin' to the rules.
'Ere'll be plenty of mesters an' sich like 'elpless tools.
But decent foremen's scarce an' woth their keep,
Saam as a good shepherd's wanted wi' the sheep.
A course 'ere's land in 'eaven !
It stan's to sense ;
It's just the saame in t'other plaace—across the Fence
Down below,
Where all th' idle foremen an' saucy mesters go.
It's bad claay land there, wi' nayther draainage nor
laabor,
Baakin' summers an wet 'arvests, an' owd Nick for
neighbour ;

Where them as 'ed good farms, and let 'em run to ruin
an' weeds,
Will 'ev to plough wi'out 'osses an' think about their
evil deeds,
While docks an' thistles shoots up nine foot 'igh,
An' nowt but craws an' 'ailstorms fills the sky.

But as fer me . . . if I doan't goa, who should?
I've done my duty; idn't that noa good?
Who can do more? Look all round the plaace,
Th' 'osses in good 'eart, 'ardly noa twitch,
The gaates an' fences sound, an' ivery ditch
Is cleeaned and dreaned an' rooaded inside out;
Our stock's as good as any hereabout;
What more d'ye want?
If I doan't goa—noa question—straight up there
Noabody couldn't; not in all this sheer.

* * * *

But when I'm there, I shan't laay in the sun,
Nor yet sit on the grass wi' a 'arp in my 'and;
I shall be thinkin' an' plottin', as I've allers done,
Plannin' an' wokkin' away for all I'm worth,
Throng on the best job ayther in 'eaven or earth.
What's that?
Why . . . Farmin' the land!

The East Wind

THE spring was mild, the air was warm,
All green the things upon the farm,
The corn put forth its tender sprout,
The daffodils came bursting out;
Above the hedge, in skimming flight,

The blackbird hardly touched the light,
Whilst in the meadows lush and green
The lambs and foals at play were seen,
When suddenly the wind turned round
And blew across from " Deadman's Ground "
(Where Farmer Rogers caught his wife
And killed her with a carving knife).
The oldest labourers about,
Who read the weather inside out,
Say, when it comes from out that quarter,
You know it's nothing else but slaughter.
For when it blows from there by night
It fills the animals with fright;
And when it blows from there by day
It drives your happiness away.
It nips the fruit, it starves the corn,
And everything that's newly born;
It sweeps the land with icy breath,
And strikes all growing things with death.
The farmer feels his liver growl,
And soon his children start to howl,
Until they wonder why the weather
Can fill a man wi' crazy blether.
He kicks his dog, then rushes out
To sack his foreman with a shout,
Growls at his wife, and scolds his daughter
Because the ducks have left the water;
He sees the wrack upon the wing,
And feels his life's a wasted thing;
The labourers, with wrinkled faces,
Are keeping in the shady places,
Afraid of wind and master, too,
And very careful what they do.
Down in the fields, with backs all hunched,
The horses and the cattle, bunched,
Stand by the hedge to miss the blast

That wails and whines and whistles past;
Their coats are ruffled wrong way round,
Because it blows off "Deadman's Ground";
Their tails are down, their eyes are dull,
And quiet is the angry bull.
But yet the sky is bright and blue
With everything of clearest hue,
The Wolds are close enough to feel
Their trees and houses cut in steel,
The sun is tempting with a smile,
The wind is slaying with a knife,
[It aggravated Rogers' bile—
He killed himself upon his wife].
It kills the young, it kills the old,
It fells the timid with the bold;
Swift as a flash, hard as a stone,
Sharp as a flint, dry as a bone,
It pierces you without a sound,
The blast that comes from "Deadman's Ground";
For when the wind is in the east
It's fit for neither man nor beast.

Fightin' Tomlinson

I SIT by the chimbley corner,
  My blood is runnin' slow,
My hands is white as a printed paage,
Wot once wor red wi' the fighter's waage,
They're withered an' wrinkled now wi' old aage;
  An' the fire's burnin' low.

Once I could lether anyone
  An' strike a knock-down blow.
My legs were limmack as a young bough,
They could race or dance or foller the plough,

But they're crookled an' wemblin' all waays now,
An' the fire's burnin' low.

I 'member me of owden daays:
At Metheringham Show
I fought young Jolland for a scarf,
I nearly broke his back in half,
He galloped hooam to Blankney Barff
As hard as he could go.

I fought an' danced an' carried on,
Razzlin' 'igh an' low;
I drank as long as I could see,
It maade noa difference to me,
I wor a match fer any three:
'Tis sixty year ago.

They called me "Fightin' Tomlinson"
(My name is Thomas Tow).
I wor the champion o' the sheer,
If any furriner come near
I never shirked nor felt noa fear,
I allers 'ed a go.

On ivery night o' Saturday,
Noa matter raain nor snow,
We gethered in the market plaaces,
An' stripped stark naaked to our waas'es,
Gev' one another bloody faaces—
A Sunday mornin' show!

I fought at all the County Fairs,
From Partney down to Stow.
They called me nobbut a "Billinger Rough,"
I niver knawed when I'd 'ed enough,
For I wor maade o' the proper stuff,
I'd like to 'ev you know.

Aye—them wor roughish times—my word!
'Tis sixty year ago,
Our heads wor hard, our hearts as well,
I wonder as we niver fell
Into the burnin' pit of hell,
Wheer dreadful fires glow.

I used to hit like this—But now
I couldn't strike a blow!
My battle's nearly lost—or won,
My poor owd limbs is omost done,
The tears is droppin' one by one,
An' the fire's burnin' low.

The Rabbit

Of all the animals alive,
Whether it's birds or beeasts of prey,
Insecks, or anything to slive,
Like snaakes or lizards, far awaay
Wi' sneeaking habit;
Of all the pests you maay contrive,
I'll back the rabbit.

Yer corn in spring's all lush and green,
You smile to watch it sprout and grow,
But who is it, besides, has seen?
Who comes to crop each tender row?
Who's sure to nab it?
Who eeats as fast as he can go?
Of course . . . the rabbit.

If he would only live on weeds,
If he would eat the thistles up,

To satisfy his hungry needs
On twitch and docks and nettles sup,
I'd call him clever;
I shouldn't care how much he feeds,
Nor hurt him ever.

But no! he must devour the corn,
The oats, the barley, and the clover;
A pest as soon as he is born,
A curse until his daay is over:
Afore it's light
He's robbing you; all through the morn,
All noon, all night.

Them plaagues what did owd Pharaoh brown
Was niver bad as rabbits be.
They would a brought his temper down
And maade him let them Jews goa free
Straight out of hand,
To git the rabbits 'cross the sea,
Off o' the land.

They breed soa fast, the mucky critters,
To fill your farm from top to toe
They multiply in endless litters,
And wants as much as you can grow,
Then asks for more;
They reap as fast as you can sow
And keeps you poor.

If somebody about the plaace
Could larn to speak their lingo true,
And just address 'em faace to faace
Explainin' what they orter do,
That's: Kill the weeds!
And leeave the corn aloan, and rue
Their evil deeds;

I shouldn't meddle wi' 'em then,
'Coz life's as sweet to them as we;
Noa doubt they're hungry, like mysen;
I haates to shoot 'em when they be
Little and warm;
Only the brutes'll live on me,
And end my farm.

Young thistle nobs is nice and tart,
The nettle, some foaks say, is good,
The dock is green and sound at heart
A lot of weeds 'ud do for food—
I understand;
If they could just be got to start,
It would be grand.

Down in the orchard yesterday,
Frisking about soa merrily,
A little 'un was out at play
As sweet a sight as you could see
That nice and warm!
It maad me wipe a tear away
Wishin' noa harm.

All soft and nice he danced around,
All innocent, he played at ease,
When, suddenly, the little hound
Began to nibble at my peas,
My garden's pride!
I shot him quick among the trees;
Gol darn his hide!

'Eer's nowt as sarves to keep 'em under;
Noa illnesses seems to upset 'em;
How it can be, I often wonder,
Noa fever nor noa droughts affect 'em.

They swarm away.
Hungry as rats, they work like thunder
By night and day.

They steal across from Burnam Wood
To maak my crops a cruel sight.
The man what owns it—Colonel Blood—
Says: When they're out I 'ev the right
To shoot or catch 'em.
Expectin' I'm to sit all night,
Just for to watch 'em!

To watch all night wi'out noa sleep,
Wi' men and dog, wi' stick and gun,
Awaatin' till his vermin creep,
And trying hard to think it's fun!
Why don't he hold 'em?
He's keepers plenty near their run,
Why can't he fold 'em?

'Eer's two things what noa man can stick,
What noabody can't farm agen—
Rabbits and watter does the trick,
And watter dreeans—unless you're Fen;
But rabbits—never;
You fight 'em till you bust yersen—
There's more'n ever!

Kill one, another takes his plaace;
Kill two, there's three about to-morrer.
They swarm afore your very faace,
They fill your heart wi' grief and sorrer:
Safe underground,
'Cept when a ferrett's down the burrer,
And guns around.

To git your own back from the critter,
'Eer's nobbut one thing you can do,
Return agen his ways, soa bitter,
Treeat him as he has treeated you;
Pay off yer score:
Pop th' owd rascal in a stew,
And grieve noa more.

The Well-Beloved

WHO's welcome in the early morn?
Who's vallied more than growing corn?
Who's humoured in the afternoon
And begged "to leave off working soon";
Told "to goa easy if he can"?
Why—Me! the able-bodied man.

This war has answered for a lot,
But now it's touched the very spot,
Our mester runs from morn to night,
Uneasy if I'm outer sight,
To keep me quiet's all his plan,
'Coz I'm an able-bodied man.

When war brok' out and all our chaps
Went marching off in sojer caps,
The mester says, "Now, Georgie Pratt,
"Your twisted leg's noa good for that;
"You wok all right enough, I know,
"But all the same you'll never go.

"Soa doan't you leave me, George, and then
"I'll treat you as I treat mysen;
"Good mesters scarce; you stick to me,
"'Coz us two allers did agree.
"You're getting plenty, but, anyway,
"I'll promise niver to drop yer pay."

I smiled at that, but didn't speak:
Afore the war, the nasty sneak—
'Tis well they named him "Cunning Jim"—
Just 'coz I had a twisted limb
He docked my daily wage a penny,
Although I wokked as hard as any.

If I wor but a minute late
He stood—his watch out—at the gate;
If I should stop to draw a breath
He used to scowl as black as death.
Once when I begged a holiday
He nearly fainted dead away.

The neighbours call him "Cunning Jim"
'Coz noa one gits the best of him,
Leastways, that allers wor his booast,
But now I've got the brute on tooast;
Afore this foreign war be done
I'll make him wish as he'd a gone.

You'd really laugh to hear him now,
It's: "Would you kindly goa and plough?"
Or, "If you're ready, George, my lad,
"To start and hoe, I should be glad;
"Just tek yer time, doan't start too fierce,
"Doan't bost yersen; good men be scarce."

He uster watch, all in a stew,
Lest I should find an egg or two;
But, now, it's: "George, tek one for tea,
"'Twill strengthen you to wok for me;
"Tek two or three; just help yersen,
"I'm all for feeding up my men."

A cat would grin to see us here,
He sweats and grooans but dossent swear,
Cusses hissen and blows and pants;
I comes to work just when I wants.
Instead of thirteen bob, and kicks,
I'm drawing twenty-nine-and-six.

He sees me come at half-past seven,
And sets his teeth (it's just like Heaven),
Bethinks hissen and tries to smile,
The yeller-bellied bag o' bile!
'Coz who the devil 'ud help to mow
If I should leave, he dudn't know.

Noabody else 'ud help him now,
Not if he paid 'em iver so;
This is my chanch, it's come at last,
To square mysen for what be past,
He pays and grooans but dossent squeak;
I raise my wages ivery week.

A shillin' ivery week I raise,
While poor owd Jimmy grooans and prays;
I tells him ivery now and then
I'm off to auctioneer mysen;
Who bids the moast and pays enew
Will have me for the next week through.

That omost scares him off his head,
But Jimmy needn't have noa dread,
I'm going to stop and pay him out,
The wankle, wizened little lout.
This is my time for laying hold—
I wouldn't leave for minted gold.

Now, as the harvest's coming on,
I rests on Sat'dy afternoon;
On Sundays in the mester's trap
I sets off wi' another chap,
To keep mysen from gitting stale:
Our mester finds cigars and ale.

My money idn't squandered, though,
These happy times is sure to go,
And when the army's gotten hoam,
Our mester thinks his time will come;
I know his nasty cunning tricks:
He'll cut us down to eight-and-six.

But not for George! what knows too much
To git his arm in sich a crutch;
I'm laying by, each week, a pound,
And when that time has come around,
With my best thanks to "Cunning Jim"
I'm going to say "Good-bye" to him.

A Farmyard Nietzsche

I

Now what's up, Missis, can't yer sleep?
Is it the wind in the chimbley, or yon owd cow?
She'll calve afore the morn
—or I'll eeat her horn,
And I do know summat about stock, as you'll allow,
For we've niver lost a heifer nor yet a sow,
Though I'm not soa strong on sheep;
Soa, Missis, doan't you toss and taave a-that-how,
Or else I shan't be up at four to plough.

II

It's not the wind, nor yet the roaring chimbley,
Nor yet my sins, John,
It's Joe, our lad, what bothers me so much;
He did to-day;
He knows too much for me: what can I say?
It's no use arguing, 'coz he has you pinned,
His words is biting as the cold east wind;
So strange and wild, so sad, and yet so true,
They seem to pierce you through.

III

You know, owd gel, as I'm agen book larnin',
It's good for nowt! I've g'en you ivery warnin',
But you must egg him on to reead awaay;
Why! I should very soon bin off my feed
If I'd a set and read like him all daay,
The same as you've encouraged in yon loft
Wi' pen and ink, till he may well be soft.
He's all he wants; if larnin' drives him mad,
If books—the devil tek 'em!—be that bad,
You've nowt to do but chuck 'em in the draain,
And stop these maggots gnawin' at his braain.

IV

What is it, Joe? Yer muther's lost her sleep,
And soa 'ev I:
What dog 'ez bin a worryin' your sheep?
. . . You doan't think it 'ud hardly int'rest me?
. . . You meean a-course as I'm too owd to see:
Why bless yer heart! When you've reached sixty-five
There's precious little as you can't contrive.

V

I've watched the horses, father, on our farm,
Watered, well fed, and never fearing harm,

So long as they keep toiling all the day,
Granted the gift of living: that their pay.
Born in the spring,
Gambolling foals, in meadows sweet they fling,
Until at last the harness comes; the bit
Is forced between their teeth: the iron bit!
Poor hopeless slaves
Whose fathers galloped over open plains
Free as the wind across the sea, their manes
Flung backward on the breeze like streaming waves;
Gallant and wild they ran, unknown of men,
Their life a true one, worth the living, then;
But, now, if horses pondered—
Instead of standing by the stable door
With ever-patient eyes that dreaming, wondered—
Instead of dreaming there for evermore—
They'd trample on and kill the young they're rearing,
By one sharp cut the ghastly cord to sever;
So that when they are dead no horses ever
Should toil and slave in horrible endeavour,
But end a life that's never worth the bearing.

VI

Stop, Joe! I couldn't listen to sich words as that,
Foaks dudn't saay sich things: they'd niver do;
The roof would fall, the lightning strike us through;
You mek me dizzy.
D'ye expect as I'm to pull the plough
While Tinker strolls inside the "Spotted Cow"
And 'ez a pint wi' Lizzie?
I couldn't stand sich things not interferin';
Why! . . . Providence itsen might be in hearin'.
Slaaves . . . kill their fooals . . . life not woth
bearin' . . .
It's blasphemy—that's flat!

VII

Father! I feel our life is lacking worth—
That's my disease;
That I shall nevermore find rest nor ease
Nor quietness, because on this strange earth
The meek, the kind, the mercifullest people—
Are ground by fate and trodden in the dust;
Their hopes all withered and their dreams a-rust,
While selfishness, and vice, and horrid lust
Are mounted on the top of every steeple.

The pious workers of each age have preached
That this our world is worthless, only reached
As one of Zion's stages—half-way there—
That we have no abiding city here;
That this is but a place of tears below;
A place of woe!
And so they dream some compensating scheme,
A heaven in which some kindly One stands fast
To balance up and make all clear at last;
Explain how sorrow came to be about;
How cruelty crept out;
Who sanctioned evil;
And who designed this diabolic revel,
This demon rout—this worse—
This devil's dance of our mad universe.

For I can see no token of that One;
No smiling providence when day is done;
No kindly ruler watching from the sky;
No One to hear our cry;
Nor sign of sanity nor wise domain—
Nothing but evil in one sad refrain.

Ruled by a blind and heartless madness,
Toiling to eat the bread of sadness,

Stooping to drink the tears of sorrow,
Hopelessly waiting each to-morrow,
Working with hate for some dread master
Who, if we halt, but flogs the faster :
Not by our will—who could pretend to care—
We live and work because the whip is there.

P'r'aps this old earth's our master ; what we fancy
Is only rocks and soil and trees and stones,
This air and land and sea, these dead men's bones,
By some wild necromancy
This earth, this ancient globe, may be our master !
Our horses cannot know who is their lord :
The carter, they imagine, owns the farm ;
They think the barking dog will do them harm,
They heed the word that falls from human lip ;
But more they fear the stinging of the whip
That drives them from the manger to the cart ;
Yet . . . how can they distinguish man apart ?

Just so, perhaps, we cannot see our master,
He being much too huge for us to see.
The trees, the grass, and all that grows—his hair ;
The lightning and the storm—his rude embrace ;
Mountains and valleys—scars upon his face ;
Outbreathing fire and smoke, he strides alone
Across the void on errand unbeknown,
Some matter that by us can ne'er be guessed,
We, who are less than dust upon his breast.
For we are not his children, as it seemed,
This world is not as we so fondly dreamed.
Counting ourselves his children, whereas, rather,
Earth is our cruel master, not our father.
Poor hopeless slaves !
For whom is nothing better, nothing, ever,
No paradise, no heaven, whatsoever.

Now, therefore, like our horses, lacking thought,
By some strange master snared, alas! and caught,
We toil at his unfathomable aim:
What shame!
To slave for this old wrinkled cruel earth
Who binds us in his iron chains from birth!
Yet if we had the wit to cogitate,
We mortals should decide to end our state,
Place bounds upon this weary universe,
Revoke for ever deluded Adam's curse,
Defy our master with a dying breath,
Cheat this old earth, this Juggernaut of death,
This Gordian knot of life and time dissever;
And, at one blow, strike off our chains for ever.

VIII

I doan't mind that, now, Joe; it blaws away;
I've felt, mysen, a-that-'ow in my day;
I can remember as a youngish chap
At times, life wodn't hardly woth a rap.
It's nobbut baggerment; it passes off
Like the green sickness, or a winter's cough.
Niver you mind about the weeak and poor,
They're just like cast-off sheep, noa less, noa more,
Noa good to noabody as iver I could see,
The sooner dead the better:
Look at me!
Am I a rickbacked hoss, a toilin' slaave?
Am I a-longin' fer an early graave?
Doan't I enjoy my life?—a-course I do,
And if you hark to me, Joe, soa will you!
Our parson says I'm nobbut a heathen chap;
But what he says doan't bother me one scrap.
I'm quite content wi' what my feythers done,
We carries on from feyther down to son.

All your ideas, Joe, comes from books,
Or them owd Rooks, the parsons—drat 'em!
(Somebody 'scrat 'em)—
Wi' their caws of sin and their taales of woe,
And their better worlds where the righteous go;
What better world d'ye want than this?
A farm to till, a wife to kiss,
A hoss to gallop, good health to enjoy—
You couldn't want nothing noa better, my boy.

Soa listen to me, Joe—
Burn them owd books,
Forget them owd Rooks;
Jump on yer hoss when the sun's poppin' out,
When the frost in the air makes you shiver and shout;
Full gallop a mile
In the owd-fashioned style,
Then tell me if livin' ain't well woth the while.

The Farmer's Lass

(A Song)

As I wor goin' to the Fair,
I met a farmer's lass.
Sez I to her, "My pretty gell,
"I cannot let you pass."
Sez she to me, "You must agree
"To let me on my way;
"For if I'm late, oh, deary me!
"What would my mother say?"

Sez I to her, "My Jinny dear,
"Your mother must abide.
"Turn round your faace, an' then apaace
"To Lincoln you shall ride.

" For Dobbin here can taake us both
" Like owt : the good owd mare !
" So up you crack upon her back,
" An' hey for Lincoln Fair ! "

She looked at me, then up she lep'
As nimble as could be ;
All in a minute we wor off—
Old Dobbin—'er—an' me.
" When we are theer you'll buy me cheer ;
" You'll ware your money free—
" A 'kerchief fine, a glass of wine,
" An' ribbons two or three ? "

" I'll buy you ribbons for your hair,
" A 'kerchief for your waist,
" A coral brooch, a string of beads,
" Whatever suits your taste ;
" Besides, we'll bring another thing
" Afore we homeward turn " ;
" What's that ? " sez she, a squeezin' me,
All anxious for to learn.

" Of course, it is a weddin' ring
" For you, my pretty dear."
She gave a cry, an' then a sigh,
An' then she shed a tear.
I stopped the mare because I guessed
It wouldn't come amiss,
An' maakin' haaste, noa time to waaste,
I gev' to her a kiss.

Just then I heard a bloorin' noise.
An' next, oh lok-a-daay !
I felt a crack upon my back,
What flung me right awaay.

As soon as I set up agen,
Alas, what should I find,
But Jinny wi' 'er feyther,
On 'is 'oss off 'ooam behind!

Poachin' Billy

LET them as likes the chapels goa galloping awaay,
A-buzzing all the Sunday, and grooaning ivery daay;
At singing hymns or praying they niver seems to tire,
But let me 'ev the settle by the Mill Inn fire.

There's some as niver smoaks nor drinks: goas sliving iverywhere
Wi' faaces leean and starving, all hungry-noazed, to peer
At what their neighbour's doing, and how and why and when;
Noan on 'em iver thinks 'ere's owt the matter wi' hissen.

Self-righteous, awming hypocrites as holds theirsens that high
You'd think as they was tenants of a farmstead in the sky.
All what *they* do is good and true, all other ways is wrong—
I'd sooner live wi' feyther's pig than mix wi' such a throng.

If *we* should spend a copper on pleasuring oursens
What's toiled and moiled and sweated down these 'ere loanly Fens,
If we should for one hour forgit our troubles sore,
We're boozers, wasters, devil's children, and a dashed sight more.

But they can ware their money on that as they likes best,
On Sunday schools, or feathering the local parson's nest,
On preaching to us heathen what doan't agree wi' they :
It's called " self-sacrificing "—" seeking the better way."

Their money brings 'em pleasure, the same as ours does,
But they looks down their noazes and starts to hum
and buzz,
Booasting as how they does a lot to glorify the Lord . . .
I think the glory's nearer hoam, if the truth was iver
knawed.

Why can't they mind their business, and let me manage
mine ?
Why can't they do a-that-'ow, the scanny, sneaking
swine ?
'Ere's Cunning Jim and Ezra Bones and ' Uncle ' Rogers,
too,
What sets the tunes and starts the hymns and leads the
chapel crew ;
He sits and sings and grooans awaay, the sweat upon
his faace,
Expecting as the noise he makes'll 'arn him extra
graace.

Me for the fields and shady woods, the stars to show
the way ;
I addle money in the night, and ware it in the day ;
I loves to dodge them keepers what thinks theirsens
so fauce,
And catching birds is better fun than wok behind a
horse ;
'Twill soon be time I started off, wi' noose and net and
wire,
But first I'm for the settle by the Mill Inn fire.

Chapel

I

WHY, Liz! you've caught me in my disabills!
I've not a deal to do but garden, now;
The taates is lookin' middlin' in their hills,
That frost last night, it missed 'em altogether,
And soon there'll be some new 'uns, anyhow.
What brings you over here this time of daay?—
What saay?—
Looked in to see if I can stand this weather?
And could I do
Wi' a pat of butter and an egg or two?
That's kind!
But when you married Bob—my son—I knew,
I telled him as I'd laay he'd niver find
Noa better manager nor maate not anywheer,
Nor iver could—I'll swear!
Soa sit down on that stump and rest ye—do,
And put your basket there;
That's it! while I'm a finishing this row;
That's better . . . so!

II

Do I remember Jim, your youngest lad?
That's a nice thing to ask me!
Wodn't he here last Sunday week to tea?
What's amiss wi' him, then? I hoap nowt bad.
Allers in mischief them young rascals be,
Ayther they're in the pond, or up a tree;
Nothing wrong? I'm glad!
Getting a good stout feller, is he,
And goas to farm work reg'lar nowadays?
That's a fine lad!
You doan't want him to grow up on the land?
But otherways?

A course you'll please yoursen what he'll be doin',
But it's the best and healthiest life a-goin',
And now men's treeated deacent, I'll be bound
As you can't beeat it, tekkin' all things round.
What's that?—
The parson wants him to goa there!
Oh! Does he?
I see!
Gardener and groom—
Hoe and broom—
Dear me!
And you think it'll lead to something better someday
'Coz he's a likely lad?
Well—Liz—
The youngest allers is!
You think as this 'ud be the likeliest way:
Two deacant suits of cast-off cloathes a year,
And drive the parson's pony iverywhere,
Two bob a daay—
Providin'—
Allers providin'—
(It's no use hidin')
As he goas to Church on Sundays, reg'lar——Eh?

III

You think as this maay be a lifetime's chance,
And feared o' me a standing in 'is waay:
You'll saay—
A-course you'll think as me what built yon chapel
Will put it front of him—
Your Jim;
Noa doubt you do,
He belongs to you;
But it's not the matter of one boy less at chapel,
There's evil deeds, there's wickedness and, worse,
There's a curse!

IV

You ask why can't I let bygones be bygones?
I will—
When them what did the wickedness and evil,
What profited by backing of the devil,
Has cleansed theirsen,
Repented—aye!—and made it good agen
To the weeak and the poor—
Then I'll forget—but not afore.
Noabody couldn't what's been through Hell,
Though, mind you—gel!
I'm not for setting men against their mesters,
There must be mesters,
It stands to sense
Somebody must plan the work and set it out,
Somebody must watch and look about,
I'm not soa dense.
On t'other hand, the men must have good food,
Noa more starvation—
That's noa good;
We want a rate foundation,
Proper wages . . . and free!
That they must be.

V

'Tis better now, although you can remember
When you was married, when yon parson come,
That's twenty year agoa—
Or more—
What—last November?
Aye! You'll remember
Things wodn't very grand in your new hoam;
I know what living meant to you;
Three bairns, and all the work to do,
The house to keep, the rent to pay,
On waages not two bob a day;

You and the bairns, you lived on . . . what?—
On bread and water!
. . . It's gone, you say?
Noa matter?
Eh?
You doan't remember?
That devil what paid our starving waage,
He died last year,
A ripe old aage,
And it wor found
He'd raaked together forty thousand pound,
All off the land—
This land—
Not by his own hand—
This Church supporter,
This parsons' friend
(What blessed his end)—
But by ours, what lived on bread and water.

VI

Now . . . tell me this—
When your fine parson came
To his grand parsonage,
And found, hissen, how matters stood,
Did he sing out for mester's blood?
Did he denounce his sweating neighbour,
What fattened on our starving labour?
Did he stand up in Church and say
As Hell would be his certain pay?
Or did he give the squire a verse
For letting us pig-styes, or worse—
" It wodn't his affair "?
It wor!
He's paid for it, six hundred pound a year,
He's paid, paid handsome, just to help the poor
What's at his door;

But did he ever?
Noa fear!
'Charitable"?
Damn his charity!
Niver noa backing for us anywhere;
He shot wi' our mester, and dined wi' the squire,
And left us to starve, while his thoughts was up higher,
He took on our childer to larn 'em their letters,
And preeached as we all must submit to our betters;
That's natural—you saay. A-course it be,
He hangs to his own, does parson—and soa must we.

VII

I've had it all afore, my dear,
In Norfolk, in yon wicked sheer—
When I wor young, 'twas ten times worse,
I hardly mind it wi'out a curse;
But it got too bad at last to bear,
And we tried to begin a Union theer,
To bind us together to help oursens,
To help each other,
One wi' another,
Not to be starved in styes and dens,
Noa more to dress our bairns in rags—
Or taaty bags—
Wi' proper food, not bread and water,
To live like human beings orter;
But . . . it niver was done—
We'd hardly begun—
When up riz the farmers all on fire,
Afeeard of waages gittin' higher;
Up riz the squires, red and sweating,
For fear as we should soon be getting—
Us wicked Radicals—in bands—
To seize the power from their hands;

Up riz the parsons, savage and cold,
Afeeard as we should be too bold
And leeave the Church to tend hersen,
Scared at the thoughts of us being free men.

They smashed us, beaten, to the ground,
Our breath all gone and niver a sound,
They got together and licked us well,
They kicked us, savage, where we fell,
Turned us adrift into the road;
" Rebels must reap what they have sowed "—
Our parson said—
(If any man's in Hell, he's there,
Or, if he isn't, God ain't fair,)
Too strong they was for us, them Three,
It was hardly play to them, you see!
We hadn't the money to rooam afield
And look for work, soa we had to yield;
We couldn't watch our childer pine,
So our Union died and left noa sign
As the parson said—
(What's now in Hell
A-burning well!)—
We—that parson said—
We had to reeap where we had sown;
But . . . gel! . . .
'Twas the wrongest victory iver known.
They'll paay for it yet if the Bible be true,
Squire and farmer and parson too,
For all must paay for the evil they do
They'll have to reeap where they have sown,
The wickedest deed as iver wor known.
To help the poor, the Church should be first;
Of them Three in their evil, the parsons was worst,
By our widows and orphans them parsons was cursed.

VIII

Who says as Britons never shall be slaaves,
He meant the rich, or else he nobbut raaves;
They stamped our Union to the ground, them Three,
Them what I called the "Devil's Trinity";
They marked for good (or bad) our men what led,
Their wives and childer had to cry for bread;
But I wor single, then, and hard to beat,
I didn't mean to lick yon parson's feet
(He'd lick mine for a drop of water now)
Soa I come to these 'ere Fens, where men are free—
Leeastways they was, to me;
Chapels about, and men what didn't bow
Or goa in fear and trembling at yon Three;
Waages was bad enough, but . . . we was free!
We had to fight, a-course, on ivery hand
For long enough to get a bit of land,
Just half a rood to build our chapel on;
But when th' owd squire died, them daays wor gone,
The young un didn't care, and let us in
In spite of all your parson's threatenin';
We got the land, and soon began to build,
A penny at a time,
A brick at a time,
We managed it all as Providence willed;
Soa up she went till we got her done,
And then our hymns of praaise begun.
Your parson clashed his teeth to hear it,
We sung soa loud he couldn't bear it;
He's yonder in his roab a-preaching,
Wi' crosses and altars and Holy Daays,
And bairns to foller th' organ's screeching,
As if th' Almighty wanted sich waays.
We sing and praay: we all rejoice,
We shout wi' all our heart and voice.

"*We could in Church if we'd a mind*"?
Ah—but—you'll find—
As Churches is nobbut for them Three:
They're not the plaace for you and me,
But for them Three and for their kind,
And all what runs and sucks behind.
If we still went to Church to praay,
We should still be getting two bob a daay,
Submitting oursens to birth and aage
And gratefully taking a starving waage
Helped out wi' charity;
Damn their charity!
We're not beggars, we're honest men,
Give us decent waages—
Living waages—
We'll maintain oursen.
But that's not their scheme,
Nor iver has been.
How does it go?—
You know—
"*God bless the squire and his relations,*
"*And keep us in our proper stations.*"
They think as we shall bolt that raw!
That's what their precious Church is for.
They're all for God, that God of theirs
What smiles and listens to *their* prayers!
But there's a diff'rent One, on high,
What hears the poor and needy cry,
What comes to help 'em in distress
Because He loves the fatherless.
Our chapel God, He doesn't smile
Upon yon Three who fattens while
The poor man's childer pines awaay,
He'll mind them at the Judgement Daay.

IX

But still, you reckon bygones should be bygones,
Eh?
In spite of all I saay?
"*Them things is long ago*"?
I know.
A-course, you'll pleease yoursen when all be done,
'Coz he's your son,
But yet, that boy as you're agoin' to sell—
What else, then, gel?—
Idn't parson bidding for his soul
Like buying a foal?
" Some deacent cloathes, two bob a daay,
" A goodish price, and all," you saay—
But yet—this lad, here, who can tell?
This favourite son you want to sell
Might be the one we're waiting for,
The *One* what's going to save the poor,
To show us how to beat yon Three,
And lead us on to victory.
We're better off down this owd Fen,
But there's plenty as idn't, women and men,
Plenty of slaaves still knocking about,
Plenty of childer " goin' wi'out " ;
Them Three be strong in other parts,
Mighty and strong, wi' savage hearts,
Where the labouring foak laays down in fear,
Same as we did in yon wicked sheer,
Waaiting for someone to come and lead 'em—
Someone wi' faith and hoap to feed 'em—
Someone to lift 'em out of Hell.
. . . It might be this lad as you're goin' to sell.
Why not?
'Twill be someone's lot—
He has my blood in his veins, your son,
Maybe he'll carry the good fight on,

Soa as his name should be niver forgotten.
Yon wicked Three woan't win alway,
There'll come a daay—
We shall find they're rotten—
Soa . . . keep him at hoam,
Doan't sell him now,
Let him stop on the land and foller the plough,
And when the Daay of Reckoning comes
Wi' its thunder and lightning—
Its trumpets and drums—
When yon Three has to reeap what they have sown,
Your boy'll be ready to fight wi' his own.

When I Wor Young

WHEN I wor young, we used to plaay
At pleasant gaames the livelong daay;
We laffed, an' danced, an' raaced about,
By night time allers tired out.
But when the morning come again,
We started off wi' might and maain,
An maade the sunny meadows ring,
While happily we'd plaay an' sing.

'Ere we goa gatherin' nuts an' maay,
Nuts an' maay, nuts an' maay,
'Ere we goa gatherin' nuts an' maay,
On a cold and frosty mornin'.

I think perhaps of all the rest,
I liked to plaay at marbles best,
At little-ring or laggy-last:
The gaames went furious an' fast,
Lest somebody wi' cunnin' plot
Should slive along an' mush the lot.

Eene Mene Mina Mo,
Erika Terika Tiny Toe,
Umpsy Bumpsy Staggery One,
One, Two, Three, and out goes she.

In winter time upon our pond,
Of slidin' I wor allers fond;
An' when at last I larnt to skaate,
I used to set the fastest raate.
Besides, we 'ad sich 'eaps o' fun,
To snowball fights we'd truant run;
While Christmas, wi' its merry chimes,
Meant gaames, an' toys, an' jolly times.

Ooats an' beeans an' barley mow,
Ooats an' beeans an' barley mow,
Do you or I or anyone know
'Ow ooats an' beeans an' barley grow?

But after winter comes the spring,
When flowers bud and birds do sing,
When suddenly wi' noisy shout,
The tops an' hoops come rollin' out.
An' when 'owd March's breezes wild
Begin to raage, then ivery child
Is busy workin' dark an' light,
To see who 'ez the biggest kite.

First the farmer sows 'iz seed,
Then 'e stands an' taakes 'iz 'eed,
Stamps 'iz foot, an' claps 'iz 'and,
An' turns around to view the land;
Waatin' for a partner,
Waatin' for a partner.
Oppen the ring an taake one in,
'Ee's waatin' for a partner.

An' when at last the summer caame,
Our daays wor all a pleasant gaame.
For outer school we'd madly raace
Towards our favourite bathin' plaace,
To splash an' dash an' swim about.
Then in the sun laay baskin' out,
Or to the haay-fields we should roam,
An' ride upon the wagons hoam.

Orange an' Lemon,
Call no one a demon.
I owe you three-farthings,
But when shall I pay you?
When I get rich, wi' plenty of money.
'Ere comes a candle to light you to bed;
'Ere comes a hatchet to chop off your head.

But now them daays is by an' gone,
An' all my games, alas, is done.
I niver plaay at marbles now,
Nor try to run a trundle bow;
But still, I love on sunny daays
To see 'ow other children plaays,
An' 'ear 'em sing agen wi' glee
Them songs wot soa enchanted me.

Now you're married you must obey,
You must be true to all you say;
You must be kind an' very good,
An' 'elp your wife to chop the wood.

The Farmer Roused

THEY saay 'ow the Jarmins be comin' to massacre all on us dead,
Wi' millions an' millions of sojers, an' "Bloodthirsty Bill" at their 'ead;
A-shootin' the wimin an' childer, a-knockin' the farm-'ouses down,
A-carryin' off foakses 'osses an' bonnin' their stacks to the groun'.

Bonnin' an' shootin' an' steaalin'! Jimmy! we can't do wi' that,
They might a-come 'ere wi' sich doin's—our bullocks is very nigh fat!
I ain't tued mysen all the summer to feed them there Jarmins fer fun,
Just fancy! Shootin' the childer! . . . Reeach me my owd duck-gun.

Grandfeyther fowt fer England agean Boney at Waterloo,
'Im an' Greeat-Uncle-William stood it the whoal daay through;
They wor scarred to death on Boney, but they managed to mester 'im then,
If them Jarmins be aaimin' fer England we mun tek to our baynits agean.

You'll dally on fer a year, boy, the crops is all lotted round,
I've arranged what's wheeat an' what's barley, an' what mun be faller-ground;
You're nobbut a boy, but—Jimmy—if I should come to 'arm,
You, an' yer muther, an' Betsy'll 'ev to manage the farm.

I've brought you up in the waays of feyther an' grandfeyther, too,
What did fer them (an' Boney!) 'll be good enough fer you;
'Ere's only two things to remember—if I doan't come back from the war—
Stick to the church of yer feythers, an' *niver sell noa straw.*

Yer cousin's joined the naavy, but this mun be settled on land,
It'll 'ev to be finished there, boy, straight-forrad, 'and to 'and;
To-morrow I'll take our labourers slap off to Lincoln Town,
Bill Bones, Jack Smith and Hodgson, Young Ben an' Walter Dring,
I knaw as they'll foller anywhere to fate fer me an' the King.
Soa fetch out grandfeyther's sword, Jimmy, an' pass me the duck-gun down.

Eldorado Brown

FOAKS laughs at us now when we talk o' the good owd daays
When taaties wor maakin' their weight in gold and money come anywaays;
But you needn't mention "South Sea Bubbles" in the saame room,
Wi' our Lincolnshire farmers when they started the 'Taaty Boom.

I remember as well as owt, the very beginnin' on it :
It started wi' my owd missus wantin' a new Sunday bonnit ;
And nowt would suit 'er but she must goa straight off to market to fit one,
Soa I yoks th' owd mare in the cart an' drives 'er awaay to git one.

When we wor comin' hoame she telled me a longish taale,
About two farmers' wives she'd overheard at a drapery saale,
Sayin' as 'ow their 'usbands 'ed got 'old of a real good thing,
Which they were keepin' quiet until it was ripe, next spring.

It wor some new fangled taaty as they called " Northern Star,"
But theer the missus made a slip an' went a bit *too* far,
Fer she said as they wor worth *at least* a sovereign a pound.
I sez, " They've 'ed more'n tea in their tea-pots, I'll be bound."

' Sovereign a pound ! Why there idn't sich a thing," sez I,
But the missus stuck to it, an' wot's more aimed soa high
That at last she persuaded me to goa an' buy a few.
Soa I bought a pound ; but, I tell yer that wor quite anew.

It wor laate for plantin' taaties, but I popped 'em in,
An' they growed like good uns, they did, as rank as sin.
Their tops kept green as grass ; real laate, until,
I dug 'em ! There wor 'ardly room in the hill.

Soa I planted 'em agen, an' all the next year through,
The rumour spread about the " Stars " an' maade a strange ter-do.
Becoz, you see, the owder sorts wor dyin' altogether,
Faalin' an' goin' rotten by reason o' the wet weather.

I 'ed noa end o' foaks that come to see 'em grawin' ;
An' should a selled 'em easy, but the missus wor too knawin'.
" Owd on a bit," she sez, " an' see what'll turn out,
" Iverybody'll want 'em next year, when it gits about."

She wor right, an' all, 'coz iverybody went mad together,
Rushin' about an' maakin' all sorts of silly blether ;
Wi' their mouths wide oppen an' their brains on fire,
An' all the while the price o' " Northern Stars " kep' creepin' 'igher.

Just after Christmas, the missus up an' selled the lot,
Ther' wor just a ton on 'em an' the price we got
Wor enough to maake yer mouth watter or yer eyes to run,
'Coz we got two hundred an' fifty sovereigns for that 'ere ton.

I wor omost craazed that daay when the missus showed me the cash,
More than we'ed iver seed in our lives :—an' got by bein' rash !
But bein' a well plucked un she sent me off wi'out more ado
To ware the whoale blessed lot in a stoan of "Eldorado".

It maade my hair stand straight on end ; I couldn't
sleep at night,
Beggin' on 'er to let 'em goa afore I died o' fright,
But she 'eld on, until, one day—oh Lor !—'ow mad
it sounds,
We selled that single stoan agen fer *fourteen 'undred pounds !*

One 'undred sovereigns fer each pound ! you talk about
gold mines !
I wor as savage as a bull to keep up wi' the times,
Soa as we could buy a farm wi' the fortune we should
maake,
But the missus put 'er foot down sudden, an' called
me a " half baake."

' We've got a fortune *now*," she sez, " an' we're goin'
to keep 'old,"
I did my best to move 'er, but she wouldn't loose the
gold.
She liked it over much, she said, to part wi' it, 'ersen,
Soa we popped it in the bank, an' I went back to
work agen.

Our neighbours all got madder till the air wor full o'
noise,
Rushin' about all mizzy-mazzy, worse than a pack
o' boys.
Iverybody 'ed some new sort as wor goin' to beeat
the rest,
All on 'em wor choice an' rare, an' each one wor the
best.

There wor " Recorder," " Discovery," an' " King
Edward " (rest 'iz bones),

" Diamonds," " Radium," " Pearls," an' all sorts o' precious stones ;
" Million Maker," " Eldorado," " Southern Star," an' " Queen o' the Veldt,"
All shapes an' sizes springin' up as 'ard as they could pelt.

But the lies they telled about 'em wor enough to sink a booat.
They maade my hair stan' straight on end, for ivery blessed sort,
Accordin' to their owners, wor *obliged* to maake yer rich,
Until at last—it served 'em raate—they fell into the ditch.

All sorts o' silly foaks rushed in to try an' do us down :
Butchers, baakers, candlestick-makers, an' rackapelts from town,
As didn't know taats from tonnups or a ram from a raake,
Provided they could git a bit, they 'edn't nowt at staake.

Poured in, they did, real anxious, wi' their money ready,
An' soon went slivin' out agen but a bit more steady.
'Avin' learnt a lesson, an'—we hoap—not quite soa dense,
Whilst their cash passed on to them as 'ad more sense.

Yis—it wor like the wicked world as yer read on in books,
Iverybody ayther rooags or knaves—ayther pigeons or rooks.

Nowt to choose between 'em ; all as greedy as could be,
Only th' missus kept me out on it entirely.

Kep' me quiet patiently lissenin' fer the crash,
It wadn't long ayther afore it all went smash.
The bottom fell outer the Boom just as it 'ed dry rot,
An' quicker 'en you might saay " knife " th' whoal thing went to pot.

That wor a nicish do, an' all, wi' iverybody 'fraaid
They wor goin' to ruin instead o' 'avin' their fortunes maade,
Fer omost a whoal year, it wor as bad as bad could be,
An' the very naame o' taaty wer' enough to sickin ye.

We wor all right, mind you, snug on our little farm,
Thanks to th' owd missus' artfulness we didn't come to noa 'arm ;
Whilst others cursed the very naame o' " Taaty " up an' down,
We gave our youngest boy the naame of " Eldorado Brown."

Things is better now an' foaks 'as got ower it once more,
But I can't think as it'll ever be the saame as it was afore ;
Leeastwaays 'ere'll be a different generation in our room
Afore they can 'ope to start another " Fancy Potater Boom."

The Wicked Countryside

Our morals are as black as ink,
Our pubs are full of beer;
Our lasses far too freely wink;
Book larnin's scarce, I fear,
For we can 'ardly read or write,
You will be vexed to hear.

It sounds a moast alarmin' taale,
An' 'ez a nasty ring,
But I can't think a glass of aale
Is sich a monstrous thing;
An' as for lads an' lasses—well,
They're bound to 'ev their fling.

That schoolin's rate enough in towns
For them what loves a bench;
But 'ere we want our boys to work—
To hedge, or ridge, or trench,
To larn to sow, an' reap, an' mow,
Not 'ow to talk in French.

An' after all be said an' done,
Our country-side breeds true,
Noa narrow-chested, pigeon-breasted,
White-faced factory crew;
An' tho' our braains mayn't be soa grand,
We do know 'ow to till the land.

'Ere's blacker crimes than them of ours,
An' worser foak I laay;
For what goes on in city slums,
'Id from the light of daay,
Would maak our honest farmers blush,
An' turn their 'eds awaay.

They're glad enough in towns to git
Our lads to show the rooad,
An' tho' we're maybe lackin' wit,
We've health an' strength, thank God.
Tho' towns maay be the best by far,
Yet let us keep on as we are.

London Town

I

TWELVE month come Michaelmas I went a trip to London Town,
An' what I see while I wor theer did somehow cast me down ;
For when I 'ad forgotten all the theatres an' shows,
The traains an' trams, an' lighted streets, the taxi-cabs in rows,
The parks agaate wi' people all as throng as Lincoln Fair,
The traffic roarin' thro' the streets enough to raise yer 'air,
Great palaces an' mansions, wi' their treasuries untold,
Enough to maak yer think as 'ow the streets be paved wi' gold,
The miles an' miles of houses, the endless lines o' shops,
Wi' richness drippin' from the comb, the saam as honey drops—
When all these things soa wonderful 'ed vanished, ivery bit,
'Ere's one thing lingered in my mind as idn't like to flit.

II

Our Andrew showed me all about, 'e steered me thro' the maaze,
'Coz I wor lost as sure as owt, an' fairly in a daaze ;

'E took me laate one night to see the theatres come out—
A dolsh o' people pourin' forth just like a rabble rout.
The women dressed an' decked around—you'd 'ardly think it true—
Wi' diamonds an' laaces fine, wi' furs an' feathers, too.
Our Andrew said as some on 'em wor carryin' that night
The vally of our farmstead ! A vain, but stirrin' sight :
Not dozens, no, but hundreds, passed away from out that door,
While Andrew said as theer wor p'r'aps a score o' theatres more.

III

Well, then, we turned our feet aside down to the river's brink—
A pitch-black water strung above wi' fairy lights a-blink ;
An' theer I see a mortal sight wot turned me inside out.
All 'uddled up for warmth lay men, an' gels, an' bairns about—
It froz' my blood to see 'em theer, soa pinched, an' paale, an' wan ;
The little bairns as thin as rails, you'd omost think 'em gone.
I couldn't beear to look at 'em for long, but Andrew said
As thousands ivery winter 'ad noawheer to laay their head.
Just fancy that ! A-starvin' theer ! Soa cold an' peeaked an' pined.
While just a step or two away the rich uns danced and wined.
" D'ye think," I sez to Andrew, " as I should 'uddle theer

" While wife an' childer went wi'out their meaat an' drink?—Noa fear.
" I'd smash a winder or a faace, I'd show 'em wot wor wot.
" It's wickedness past all belief as them poor souls should rot
" When others carry on their dress the vally of our farm;
" Afore I'd stand such treatment I should do a deal of harm.
" I'd kill a dozen on 'em first, I'd knock their faces flat,
" It maaks me feel all 'ot inside to think mesen like that."

IV

But Andrew looked at me an' says as gentle as 'e could,
" If they wor owt like you are, Dad, they wouldn't want for food.
" They're workshys, an' they're waasters, an' they moastly booze as well;
" They're failures an' they're losers wot's tumbled into hell,
" They weean't work, or they can't work, or they niver try at all.
" You can't 'elp anybody as weean't oppen out their stall."

V

'E talked me down, I must confess, and yet I can't agree;
I couldn't argy wi' 'im, but it doan't seem rate to me
As some should pine an' starve outside while others snug and warm.
Should deck thersens like peacocks wi' the vally of our farm.
I think the reaason on it is that London is to blame.
We're diff'rent in the country, 'coz we're niver put to shaame.

We're 'appy an' contented, for iverybody theer
'Ez food an' drink an' shelter an' summat fit to wear.
I'm sure as that's the reeason, tho' they cannot understand
As they'll niver get things raatled till they goa back to the land—
Wheer them wot has, will lend a hand to them as is wi'out,
Not let 'em starve to death while they goa stravagin' about,
Wheer all can get a livelihood, wheer noabody need pine
(I'll grant you 'ere's noa fortunes, but for them we niver whine).
Yes, that's the reason, surely, as they've sunk soa darkly down.
The Almighty maade the country, but the devil maade the town.

Father to Son

CAN'T niver 'ope to maak a fortune?
O' course you can,
A farmer can do it just as eaasy
As another man.

'Ere's nowt at all to stop you climbin'
Rate up the tree
Exceptin' lack o' braains to take you,
As I can see.

You saay as 'ow the time for fortunes
Is past an' gone,
When wheeat 'ud fetch five pound a quarter
An' went like fun.

While now its nobbut thirty shillin',
An' laabour dear,
Noa chanch for you, 'owever willin',
You sadly fear?

'Ere's just three things as maaks success,
I'll tell 'em you,
They call the lot on 'em spaade virtues,
An' calls 'em true.

Honesty, Industry, an' Perseverance,
They do the trick,
Stick to 'em tight as beeswax, an' you'll find
They also stick.

Niver you mind about bein' clever,
Nor bein' smart;
I'll back slow an' sure agen 'em
For my part.

'Owever high you goa, remember this:
Niver speckylaate;
If you do, you're bound to come a cropper,
Sure as faate.

That's about all I 'ev to saay, boy,
'Coz it's noa good
Tryin' to put owd 'eds on young shoulders,
Not if I would;
I'd rayther yer larnt yer own lessons,
Then chew yer cud.

Bonfire Night

I

'Twas Coronation day!
Down in our village all was hustle,
The oldest folk got in a bustle,
Tumbling in each other's way.

One week ago in solemn talk,
Like geese around a cabbage stalk,
Our elders gathered, firmly bent
To dignify the great event;
Some wanted lamps by night to blaze,
Some hankered monuments to raise,
Others were for a peal of bells,
Or dreamed of temperance hotels.
But Eli Baker firmly rose,
With ruddy cheeks and purple nose,
Amid that hubble-bubble crew,
Declaring lamps would never do
'Coz them what left the pubs at night
Would rather manage wi'out a light;
And all the other cranks, he said,
They wanted standing on their head;
If 'twas to be a day of joy,
Then let 'em feast, both man and boy!
Beef and ale!
That's the tale!
Beef by the round and beer by the pail.

II

The labourers shouted and threw up their hats,
Whilst the blue-ribbons stared at each other like rats,
Declaring as they shouldn't never agree
To the taking of anything stronger than tea;
But when it was over they settled it fair
That each one should have what he wanted—or dare,
And so on this day of all days in the year
We was jolly and happy and full of good cheer,
Including that marvel to all of his neighbours—
What never had rested before from his labours—
What never was known for to chatter or dawdle—
You know who I mean—"Cheap" Henry Caudle.

He took the prizes everywhere—
The meanest man in Lincolnshire,
For even " Cunning Jim ", they say,
Could learn from Henry any day ;
Henry it was that fitted stock
With spectacles of greenish glass,
Then gave 'em straw, the artful cock,
Them thinking they was eating grass !
Of all the mean 'uns in the land
Our Henry was the master-hand ;
He'd never smiled nor joked afore,
His face was like a cellar door,
His legs were thin, his lips as well,
His clothes they hung . . . they nearly fell !
But now he fairly opened out,
He laughed and talked and jumped about,
Till all the folk were sore perplexed
And wondered what would happen next.

III

The day wore on as it begun,
With sports and games and heaps of fun ;
The oldest women could be seen
A-dancing on the village green ;
The band was there with merry jig,
While " Sailor " Barlow won a pig
By climbing up the greasy mast—
He fell and fell, but won at last ;
The beef was good, the beer was prime,
We'd never had so grand a time ;
And when the dusk began to fold,
Then everybody, young and old,
Drew up towards Joe Bristow's Mill,
Above the village, on the hill,
The highest point of ground by far,
Where, round a barrel full of tar,
The straw and wood were piled on high,
Ready to leap across the sky.

IV

The dusk crept up without a sound,
And owls were screeching all around,
As, standing with a ready match,
"Cheap" Henry, studying his watch,
Had pushed himself to be the first,
While Eli Baker, fit to burst,
Was shoved into the second row;
Poor chap! he simply had to go,
For Henry stood the king confessed,
And all astonished gave him best
To see him so transmogrified.
He glared about with awful pride
Upon the neighbours gaping round,
Who stared at him without a sound.
He saw the village down below,
His stacks all lying in a row
(His farm was close beside the Mill:
No floods could touch him on that hill);
His pride was awful to behold,
It turned poor Eli Baker cold. . . .
The hour came—he closed his watch,
And, with a flourish, struck the match.

V

Across the dark from place to place
The fires were spreading, now, apace,
Till soon they saw the encircling night
With winking points of flame alight;
Across the Fen, along the Wold,
That fiery signal swiftly rolled,
Around, about, it flew, until
It finished up on Lincoln's hill.
But over all the fires about
Ours was the best, beyond a doubt;

We stood upon a point of ground
Higher than anything around,
" We beeat 'em all, we lick the lot,"
Says Henry, getting rather hot;
" We larn 'em how, a-course we do,
" As good as any other two."
He rushed about, he plied his rake,
He shouted for the dead to wake,
And when he spied a sturdy boy
Who carried in his arms with joy
A faggot for to feed the beacon,
Says he, as solemn as a deacon,
" Come, lads, you do as he's begun,
" And there's a penny for every one."
The boys ran off, and soon returned
Like laden bees; the faggots burned,
While all the neighbours, hushed and still,
Saw miracles upon that hill,
As Henry gave his pence away!
A sight for Coronation day!
A thing enough to raise the dead.
His nephew cried, " You're off your head,"
But Henry didn't care a bit;
" Come on, my boys, we'll give 'em it,
" We'll show 'em how, we'll top the lot,
" And make a blaze to cook their pot ".

VI

They did!
They did!
The stars were hid!
That bonfire blazed and flared away
Until the night was turned to day,
Till all the other fires about
Were clean out-faced and dwindled out.

And when they all was dead and still
Ours flared away beside the Mill,
Whose shadow jumping on the ground
Showed sails that moved, but never round;
And when at last we left to sup,
Still Henry raked the ashes up;
Whilst all the neighbours, fairly dazed,
Could talk of nought but Henry—crazed.

VII

Uprising with a dreadful yawn,
"Cheap" Henry scrambled out at dawn
To see his men were prompt at work,
Afraid as some of them might shirk.
Like one who's had a fearful dream
And wakes remindful of his scream,
He had a vague idea of horror,
But couldn't guess on that to-morrow—
What could have clouded him with sadness—
His craze had flitted with his madness;
He only knew that something wrong
Had overcome his head—so strong—
And straight into his yard he sped,
Then, all at once, he stopped like dead.

His stack of firewood, gathered, prime,
Provision for the winter-time,
Each faggot neatly trimmed and tied,
Carefully laid and tinder-dried,
A sight for sluggards lacking care,
A lesson clear . . .
Oh, Heaven! . . . Where . . . ?
He blinked his eyes—
It wasn't there!

Lincolnshire

Two streams have issued from thy wat'ry breast,
Two famous bands have sallied from thy nest;
One strove for home, one ventured to the west,
The Pilgrim Fathers and the Ironsides.
One filled Old England with undying fame,
Their leader, tempered steel, their hearts aflame,
The other raised immortally thy name;
Throughout a hemisphere thy seed abides.

Unique thou standest lifted from the wave
Where Roman, Dutch, and English joined to save;
And step by step to fight that heaving grave—
The hungry sea,
That beats untiring at thy outer gate,
That roars and rages with undying hate,
And threatens, shouldst thou falter, with the fate
Of Zuyder Zee.

Thy deathless songster, Tennyson, did raise
His silvern voice to trumpet forth thy praise;
Thy homely virtues, graven in his lays,
Still brightly glow.
These bear thy fame aloft the ages through:
Brave Hereward and saintly Bishop Hugh,
Grave Burleigh and intrepid Franklin, too,
Sir Isaac Newton and Jean Ingelow.

Horncastle, Partney, Stow, thine ancient marts
Are fading to decay;
Deep in our hearts
Those sacred spires our fathers raised on high—
Lincoln, Boston, and Grantham hold the sky;
Old abbeys whispering of the ages past—
Swineshead, Kirkstead, Bardney, and, last,
Viewed from afar, beneath low evening skies,
Thy towers, Tattershall, we ever prize.

We love thee, Lincolnshire, our mother, thou;
We worship thee, whilst following the plough,
We need no cities' fame nor glittering strand,
Nor wealth seek we;
Only thy level Fen and gentle Wolds,
Our fathers' graves thy memory enfolds,
For life and death our fate thy bosom holds;
Content with thee,
Who hold'st us in the hollow of one hand,
The other barring with an iron band
The eternal sea.

Church

I

Good morning, Joe!
I'm glad to see you by the window, so—
A nasty time you've had,
Bad!
Eh?
The doctor—"a good feller"?
I daresay,
I've never been ill mysen, you see,
So ain't had nowt to do with he.
"I shall know about it if ever I'm ill"?
Mebbe I will,
But . . . Joe . . .
About you, though—
I'm sure you're getting better now,
Your colour's back, and, anyhow,
You're looking fine:
It's a good sign:
What?—what!
Doan't say so!

Come—Joe—
Rubbish, man!
Doan't give up living while you can,
Sich nonsense talking about dying;
It's 'coz you've been so long a-lying,
Just 'coz you're weeak and low,
But . . . that'll go;
The crops is looking splendid down the Fen,
The wheeat's in ear,
Harvest's near,
And very soon we'll have you out again.

II

D'ye mean it, Joe?
'You've known it all along"?
I hope you're wrong!
But . . . if it's so—
I wouldn't have you deceive yoursen,
'Tis best to know—
You'll want me to fetch your parson, then?
No!
You must want parson to get you ready,
You've allers been to Church that steady—
Not what I call religious, though;
Often I've wanted to talk to you, Joe—
Serious like, but never got started,
That chicken-hearted!
You've gone to Church and prayed o' Sunday,
But never carried it over Monday—
Church foak dudn't—
I know!
That's not religion, though;
Religion lives wi' you,
In bed at night,
By dark or light,
Never from sight,

Allers there,
Everywhere;
The sureness of Hell—
For there *is* a Hell—
That awful fire down below,
Where all what isn't saved must go,
You too—poor Joe!
Unless you're saved.
But . . . you know—
You *can* be saved,
Salvation's free
For everyone, for you, for me;
You've only got to say the word,
It'll be heard; it'll be heard;
And now—let's say a prayer together.
No?
When Death is staring in your face!
Surely you'll wake and seek for grace,
Surely, then . . . Joe!

III

Wait a bit, Jim, and lissen, now, to me,
I doan't want to be "saved"—as you would say—
Not if 'tis arned your chapel-going way;
It's nowt to judge you by, as I can see;
Look at our precious neighbour, Tommy Stower,
One of your saints, a reg'lar chapel-goer;
Preaches about and goes to all your "do's",
Looked on as most religious in his views,
A pious man!
Held up to answer, "Can religion pay?"
A-course it can!
Hasn't it paid your Tommy Stower well?
But—Jim—
Would you take his word when he's anything to sell?
About a horse? . . .

He keeps within the law for fear of worse,
Knowing exactly just how far to go ;
His word it isn't worth a tinker's curse !
Why—Jim—
Noabody ever *dreams* of trusting him,
And—being so—
Ain't he the very worst man as you know ?
Nay, lad, you couldn't doubt
As he's the blackest rascal hereabout,
Look how he leads astray his weaker neighbours,
What sees him prosper by his wicked labours ;
They foller on to do what he has done,
Him what has risen from a poor man's son,
Thinking how fine are his religious ways
What gets him straight to heaven—yet allers pays—
Though—mind you, Jim,
There's plenty goes to chapel besides him
What's just as straight and square as they can go—
Chaps like yoursen,
The fairest men ;
That's not what I was meaning, though,
For both sorts goes and prays together,
Birds of a very different feather,
Some of 'em hypocrites, and more—
Isn't he one, your pious Stower ?
Isn't he one ?
Look at the wicked things as he has done !
And—Jim—
He's stronger—far—than we,
He spreads hissen just like the " green bay tree ".
Parson once said :
' *The evil what men does lives after 'em,*
' *The good is moastly buried wi' their bones.*"
That's true, you know !
And—being so—
Your Stower—

Your pious chapel-goer—
He'll carry on when you and me lies flat ;
Mind that !

IV

What *do* I believe then ?
I'll tell you, Jim.
I believe in doing fair to all men,
Even to Tommy Stower,
Even to him.
It's been hard :
He's a bad card !
But I tried to mind as he didn't cheat me,
Yes, I took good care ;
I didn't want rascals like him to beat me,
Soa I treated him fair ;
What I ask of others is just the same,
" Do to others as you'll be done to,"
That's about all as life'll run to.
That's my religion, Jim,
That's my game.
You can't ask more on this rum owd earth,
What's full of kinks and knotty places,
And hypocrites wi' smiling faces—
Wrong uns from birth.
It's not a perfect world,
It's not a righteous world,
Yet it's not a bad world ;
If a man does fair you can't ask for more ;
As I said afore,
It matters nowt where he goas to pray—
Whether chapel or church—
Wherever he perch,
Or whatever he say—
That's nowt to do wi' his inner man,
It's niver noa guide to his inner plan.

You've got to judge a tree by its fruit,
Not by the garden where it has root,
And so you must judge a man by his life—
How he sarves his friends—
How he gains his ends—
How he treats his wife;
If he passes that test he's good enough—
Not far astray—
But . . .
Otherway—
He's wrong!
Noa matter where he may belong—
He's wrong!

V

I've gone to Church like feyther did:
When I was but a little kid
I set wi' him agen the door,
My feet could hardly touch the floor,
And everything was strange to me;
But through the porch I loved to see
The birds what chirped and flew about,
To see the flowers peeping out,
Or listen to the humming bees,
Or watch the clouds across the trees;
And, later, I was glad to go:
'Twas reg'lar, and it pleased me so
To sit where feyther did, and hear
The selfsame things come year by year,
Not keep a-squinting at my soul
To see if it be "saved" or no,
Like something planted in a hole,
Raved up to find if it will grow,
'Coz that's what little childer does:
There's summat wrong wi' sich a buzz.

Some niver thinks unless they're ill ;
P'r'aps they're afraid to face their bill ;
They reckon as a parson's prayer
Will somehow put 'em on the square,
Thinking they're like the dying thief—
It's only thieves wants such relief—
I'm sartin Tommy Stower will—
You'll see, if ever he be ill !

* * * *

Parson will come this afternoon—
'Tis on his round—he'll be here, soon,
And read to me the regular prayer,
One for the sick, all right and square.
Soa, come what may, I shall scramble along,
Noa patching me up at the very last breath,
Noa trying to get me ready for Death—
What's the good of that if your life's been wrong ?

VI

I'm staring Death full in the face,
It's just about the end of my race ;
I can't mend it,
I can only end it.
But—Jim—
Whatever's waiting for me yonder—
I often wonder—
Whether it's Peter or, mebbe, Paul,
Or p'r'aps there's noabody at all !
But, if it's Peter, he'll give me a stare,
Then—
" *Have you done fair ?* "

I shall answer him square :

" I can't say ' allers', Peter, . . . I couldn't—
" Noabody dudn't—

" If they nobbut confessed;
" But—I've done my best.
" I've got noa money to boast about,
" And, as for praying, I never could shout;
" No . . . No . . . I ain't allers done fair,
" But—swelp me, Peter—I've allers tried."

* * * *

What can he say, but—" *Come inside* "?

Lincoln Fair

When I wor young and soft as greease, I went to Lincoln Fair,
And what I fun' while I wor there, gev' me a nistish scare;
More fellers than I'd iver seed, as cloas as sheep in pens,
Huddled together wi' their gels, enjoyin' of theirsens.

Tents, and booths, and stalls in rows, like magic in a dreeam,
Bands, and gongs, and silver bells, and organs driv' by steeam;
Roundabouts what maad a noise, a dozen altogether,
Blorin' awaay, rate in yer ear, to deafen yer for iver.

Great wild beeast shows, and picture tents: what they call " bi-o-scope ",
And circuses where elephants was said to walk the rope;
I went inside a boxin' booth to see a kangaroo
Wi' gloves on boath her hands and feet, and fighting wi' 'em, too!

Then the fat woman ! ooh, my word ! she wor a boster ;
Why !—
She wor as big as our fat pig—the one as brok' her sty !
But, best of all, the drinkin' bars, as full as full could be
Wi' thirsty men a-drinkin' beer, happy as they could be.

Happy as they could be, my boys !—pass us a mug of aale,
Let them as will deny theirsens, for I can drink a pail ;
And if I iver owns a farm I'll drink it out er tubs :
Confound all them teetotal hounds, what wants to cloaz the pubs !

They chucked me out when I wor full ; I fell upon my nod,
And when I scrambled up agen I came across Young Dodd.
He telled me of a hoss whose head was wheer its tail should be,
And how its tail in turn was wheer its head you'd think to see.

This sounded sich a curious thing, I planked my money down,
And galloped up a flight of stairs to see mysen done brown.
For, fastened to a manger there, an old nag-hoss, I found,
Tied wi' his tail up to the crib, standin' the wrong waay round !

As soon as I got back my breath and started to let fly,
The man what awned the show slived up and winked a quiet eye.
" They'll all know what a fool you've bin if you mek sich a bawl,
" Shut up, you chump," says he, " and send yer maates inside, and all."

This seemed to me soa good a plan I went outside at once
To tell all them what stood around they mustn't miss the chance ;
I laughed till I wor fit to bost, as they come sneakin' out,
When Tinker Barlow run across and handed me a clout !

We settled down to fightin' then, a dozen in a heap,
Wi' policemen titherin' around like dogs among the sheep.
They pulled us out, an' took us off, awaay to Lincoln Gaol,
To cool our heads inside a cell, wi'out a drop of aale.

I got hoam when they let me goa, wi'out my coat and hat,
Wi' all my money gone, a course ; glad to git off wi' that !
They cooked my goose, they did me brown, they skinned me like a hare,
And sin' that daay I've niver been anigh on Lincoln Fair.

The Home of my Fathers

I AM leaving the home of my fathers,
Home of my childhood's days,
The place that I was born in,
To follow my father's ways,
Who held the farm before me,
Long generations through ;
Their graves are in the churchyard—
I would that mine were, too.

I've farmed here all my lifetime,
The only home I know;
How could I ever leave it?—
They say I've got to go.
My roots are deeply buried
Far down in this old fen,
They're much too tough to loosen,
They won't come up again.

The orchard with its apple trees,
The dairy, dark and cool,
The pigeon-cote, the willows,
The ducks upon the pool;
The stackyard through the garden door—
My yard, that I shall walk no more!
Nor watch the wagons come,
When on the topped-up load they shout,
And lead the "Harvest Home".

The land, the land, I know so well,
I know it all by heart!
And blindfold, every foot could tell,
Down to the far-most part;
O! pastures where the soil is rich. . . .
O! furrows straight and true!
O! pleasant smell of burning twitch!
You bind my heart to you.

They are selling the home of my fathers,
Home of my childhood's days;
Why don't they sell me with it?
I'm too old to change my ways.
My heart went in when I sowed the corn,
Too deep and far to trace;
I'm too far gone, like an old oak tree,
I shall wither away if they meddle with me,
It's the place where I was born. . . .
Let me die in peace by my fireside,
And lay my bones where my fathers bide.

An Extract from the "Morning Post" on "Farming Lays"

Writing in the Mixo-Lydian dialect of the Lincolnshire Fens—it is slightly more plastic than that of Yorkshire, which is Doric speech—Mr. GILBERT has ignored the verse-fashions of to-day, more particularly what may perhaps be called the Masefield manner, and has set forth in a species of Crabbe-like prose-poetry the humour and felicity and vexation and comfortableness of the rustical life of which he is still a part. He has, in fact, made pictures of the well-to-do Lincolnshire farmer which are not unlike Drummond's sketches of the *habitant* of Quebec; that is to say, his characterization is essentially dramatic, and only to be appreciated at its true value in the process of recital. Some of the pieces here collected originally appeared in the columns of local newspapers, and they would have been buried in that "poets' corner" but for the publisher's discovery that, on jolly evenings in wayside inns, where hard-working men were gathered together after the day's work, they were read or recited, and received with favour by incorruptible critics—the very people whose works and days had been reduced to rhyme and reason. Balzac declared that the country tavern is the real Parliament of the people, and its vote of confidence in Mr. GILBERT could not be overlooked.

These are easy-going pieces with never a trace of cleverness; it is seldom indeed that a single line insists on being remembered apart from its context. Such a description as that of the self-pitying work-shy, victim of misfortune:

> "The shammackin' shack-bags as boozes and rumbles about 'iz sorrows,"

sticks in the memory like a burr. . . . But, as a rule, the whole poem is woven of one texture, and to quote a line or couplet of it would be like pulling a pinch of whiskers as a keepsake off the ruddy face, a veritable Harvest-moon in its jocundity, of the conservative-minded old farmer whom it commemorates. Mr. GILBERT's farmers and farm labourers are quite content, thank you, with things as they are and have been. . . .

And, last and greatest merit of all, these poems are full of solid eating and wholesome drinking: everybody eats and drinks, as Spurgeon smoked, to the glory of God; even luncheon under a hedge is a kind of sacrament. . . .

Easy enough to write such easily-read stuff; so easy as not to be worth while. So thinks the town-bred poetaster—let him only try, and he will find that you cannot cross the gulf between *simplesse* and *simplicité* on a raft made of literary reminiscences. Mr. Lear's humorous tiny sketches in the margins of its pages add to the pleasure of reading a little book which is worth its weight in wild-flowers from the Lincolnshire Fens.

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